



National College for  
School Leadership

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Inspiring leaders;  
improving children's lives

# Student Leadership

Investing in tomorrow's leaders for  
schools and communities



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*"The course was great and really helped me with my school council business. I am much happier now and loads more confident"*

## Foreword

We are delighted to introduce you to ‘Student leadership: Investing in tomorrow’s leaders for schools and communities’. For the last three years, working with the London Challenge team, the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) has been committed to the development of student leadership in London schools. The Student Leadership Programme, introduced by this document, has been written by students, for students. It aims to develop young leaders in our schools who are committed to making a difference to their own lives and to the lives of others. The programme is now available nationally and NCSL is pleased that it is being delivered through two organisations with considerable experience in working with young people and with schools: Community Service Volunteers and the University of the First Age.

Student leadership lies at the heart of improving our schools and enabling young people to realise their potential. It builds the necessary skills, confidence and motivation for young people to engage directly in the wider improvement of the school and, in particular, in the improvement of the learning experience. It enables students to become advocates for their own needs and the needs of others. It lies at the heart of building a sense of community and trust in school and builds effective relationships. An investment in student leadership is a direct investment in tomorrow’s leaders of our schools and of our

communities. For many schools, it quite simply lies at the heart of their moral purpose, as recognised by one of the school leaders who took part in the London Challenge programme when she said, “for us it is quite simply the right thing to do – it lies at the heart of leading with moral purpose – we cannot exclude 85 per cent of the school community from the leadership development we are engaging in as an organisation”.

We at NCSL hope that this document will help you to share in some of the excitement and achievements of young people as they develop their own leadership. We hope it will encourage you to look again at how you develop young leaders in your school and to access the Student Leadership Programme, which you will read about here, to support you.

Schools that have been involved in the Student Leadership Programme have reported significant changes in the young people who took part and changes in the school as a result of their school-based work. As students become more aware of leadership actions and behaviours, they seek out role models, both in each other and in the school staff around them. An investment in student leadership is a direct investment in leadership across the school as student leaders begin to demand more of the adult leaders in the organisation and to work with them in a joint endeavour to transform their school.

## Executive summary

This document celebrates the work of around 400 young people from over 30 schools across London who co-developed, piloted and tested a programme of materials for developing student leadership.

Central to the policy framework for coherent children's services and the raising of achievement is the greater engagement of young people in the process. Student leadership is a critical area of work that can no longer be ignored by school leaders.

In this document we will describe:

- how the programme was developed
- the principles underlying NCSL's Student Leadership Programme
- what we learnt
- what the young people learnt
- how this programme and the learning from it can support school leaders to meet their objectives

The document will enable school leaders to understand the context and the content of the programme and its value to them. It will also explain why the model is an important development in how we build effective and meaningful relationships with young people in our schools.

*"I have learnt other talents that I never knew that I had before. I also now know how to always smile because it really does make a difference"*



## Student Leadership Programme

### Introduction

The project was initiated by NCSL in response to its agenda on distributed leadership, community leadership and the development of pupil (and student) voice. The development of the Student Leadership Programme was supported and funded by London Challenge through the London Leadership Strategy. It was therefore subject to various constraints and had to meet specific targets and outputs set by London Challenge. These were central to the policy framework for coherent children's services, raising achievement and the greater engagement of young people in the process.

It was worked in three phases over two and a half years. There was an initial phase of writing, delivery, re-design and co-development with young people, a second phase of trialling and amending the materials and a third phase of initial roll-out in London. This work has been done through partnership with NCSL, the University of the First Age (UFA) and Community Service Volunteers (CSV). The foundation module was also worked in part with Improving Self Efficacy, Self Esteem and Confidence of Children and Adults (ISECCA), a charity based in Dorset which works in the field of emotional intelligence.

### Background to the programme

The London Leadership Strategy focuses on the development needs of school leaders in London schools. The strategy is one strand of the London Challenge initiative described in Investments for Reform (DfES, 2002). The strategy focuses on developing all aspects of leadership capacity within London secondary schools and is being run in partnership by NCSL and the London Centre for Leadership in Learning.

The aim of the programme's development was to produce training materials, co-developed by young people at Key Stage 3 in London schools, in order to help develop young leaders in London. The programme has been developed in school time and also out-of-school hours, on Saturdays and during holidays, with students voluntarily giving up their free time to participate.

The Student Leadership Programme consists of six leadership modules that mirror the six National Standards for Headteachers (DfES, 2004) and the NCSL Learning to Lead curriculum. Following the development and first roll-out phase, the Student Leadership Programme will become available beyond London.



*"You can see that once the sessions have been run over a few courses they will be outstanding"*

The six modules are:

- **Foundation module 1:** Understanding self and working with others
- **Module 2:** Shaping the future
- **Module 3:** Leading learning and teaching
- **Module 4:** Building a community and collaboration
- **Module 5:** Managing an organisation, programme or project
- **Module 6:** Securing accountability, impact of your actions and taking responsibility

The programme has shown that schools that participate in the programmes will have:

- young people who are motivated, ready and enthusiastic to initiate leadership work in school
- students who are ready and able to cascade the learning from the course to others

- young people who have an increased possibility of success in attainment and achievement
- students who could act as ambassadors and champions for the school
- young people who could become lead learners in, and organisers of, extending and enriching activities
- a curriculum to deliver part of their personal, social and health education (PSHE) outcomes

As students participated in the modules, it was hoped that they would acquire a greater understanding of themselves and their abilities as well as the skills and attributes of leaders. The table below shows the sort of learning that students would be able to identify with after participating in the Student Leadership Programme.

*"I have realised I have skills that I was not aware of and now also able to share these with others. I would really recommend the course to others"*



As a leader I am able to ...	Module
be committed to teamwork	All
be committed to checking my understanding and yours	All
be committed to identifying shared vision and values	All
model effective communication – listening, language, body language, etc	All
recognise and respond to different attitudes and skills	All
demonstrate my ability to influence others	All
lead by example	All
coach others	All
identify the advantages and disadvantages of situations	All
give effective presentations	All
know about my own and other people's learning styles	1, 2 and 3
understand my own needs and characteristics	1
understand the needs and characteristics of others	1
make effective use of my emotional toolkit	1
use this knowledge to inform my own leadership and teamworking	1
be committed to valuing every person's contribution and role	1
be committed to supporting others	1
know about future thinking	2
manage change	2
encourage creativity	2
identify a range of learning opportunities and experiences	3
be committed to encouraging others to participate in life-long learning	3
lead learning in my school and beyond	3
be committed to distributed leadership	4
build trust and respect within a group	4
be committed to consulting and involving others	4
represent the views of the group	4
build and maintain effective relationships with a wide range of people	4
make best use of physical resources	5
consider financial implications	5
meet deadlines and other specifications	5
be committed to identifying group purposes and objectives	5
be committed to involving others and brainstorming ways forward	5
be committed to action-planning (objectives, milestones, deadlines etc)	5
review effectively – plan, meet objectives and learn for the future etc	5 and 6
use effective evaluation to inform future planning	5 and 6
monitor progress and review group attitude	6
develop collective responsibility	6
both make and receive constructive criticism	6

## Programme and module overview

### Foundation module: Understanding self and working with others

Students learn to:

- understand more about oneself in terms of being a learner and a leader
- develop and reflect on one's understanding of one's own emotional health and emotional responses in various situations
- improve time organisation as a leadership skill
- develop the idea of roles and responsibilities
- develop further the idea of teamwork
- develop further listening and communication skills
- use problem-solving to investigate more deeply situations which may occur that require leadership skills to be exhibited
- reflect on one's own leadership skills

### Module 2: Shaping the future

Students learn to:

- nurture a strong and positive learning culture and develop enthusiasm and understanding of the learning process
- model and develop effective communication skills, both verbal and non verbal
- develop vision and goals
- develop understanding of future thinking
- develop an ability to manage change
- develop an ability to influence others through reasoned argument and debate

### Module 3: Leading learning and teaching

Students learn to:

- nurture a strong and positive learning culture and develop enthusiasm and understanding of the learning process
- develop an understanding of the nature of effective learning and teaching and the strategies that support learning and teaching
- link with the learning and teaching practices in the curriculum and within the wider life-long learning agenda
- identify the role that student leaders can have in influencing policy and contributing to the education debate locally and nationally

### Module 4: Building a community and collaboration

Students learn to:

- nurture a strong and positive understanding of distributed leadership, particularly in the context of working within diverse groups
- develop an understanding of how to engage with diverse groups of people and how to develop trust and effective working relationships
- develop an understanding of the different community contexts that they may be involved with
- identify the role that student leaders can have in their local community, and in influencing policy and contributing to the community debate locally and nationally



### Module 5: Managing an organisation, programme or project


Students learn to:

- nurture a strong and positive understanding of managing a project or programme and the importance of planning and reviewing
- develop an understanding of the key differences between managing and leading
- develop an understanding of how to identify clear and definable aims and objectives, the steps required to achieve them and how to effectively monitor progress and evaluate the end result
- develop an understanding of equal opportunities and discrimination issues and how to equally engage and motivate others to contribute
- identify the role that student leaders can take in leading a project or programme, both setting up new ones and maintaining existing ones

### Module 6: Securing accountability, impact of your actions and taking responsibility

Students learn to:

- nurture a strong and positive understanding of accountability as a leader and of how to develop a sense of collective responsibility within the groups that they work with, taking into account any legal, financial or other relevant rules
- develop an understanding of how different people are involved in projects or organisations and how to clarify who is responsible for what
- develop a commitment to monitoring and reviewing their own roles.



*"The facilitators were brilliant and have a fantastic grasp of the pace and control needed to deliver the course effectively"*

## Underlying principles for the programme

We based the work on the beliefs that:

- leadership skills are learnable
- leadership is a far broader concept than may have been historically thought
- development of meaningful voices and influence for young people requires a common language between participants and a shared starting point between school and students
- student voice and influence raises standards
- the raising of young people's aspirations as life-long learners leads to greater success for them
- the outcomes of Every Child Matters will be developed, especially for young people, and will make a positive contribution and build skills that will support them in achieving economic well-being in the future
- learning both inside and outside of the school setting is transferable when the process is made explicit
- working in partnership with agencies other than schools is essential for raising achievement and aspiration
- young people will become coaches and facilitators for other students over time

During this process of development, we have identified some of the conditions that we believe have contributed to its success and effectiveness. These are:

- an intense experience – three to five consecutive days
- a challenge framework
- facilitation and coaching rather than teaching
- a ratio of at least 1 facilitator to 15 young people
- increasing responsibility is given to young people over three days
- explicit learning processes
- high support for individuals, coupled with increasing personal challenge activity
- attention to the use of questions

*"I now feel on top of the world"*



## How the course was developed

### Design

The module materials and resources were written initially by experienced adult facilitators from UFA. They were designed so that they presented the subject content in a number of different learning models and review frames. The 3-day course was then run with 30 students drawn from Key Stage 3 in 3 or 4 schools, often, though not always, from the same borough. After experiencing the course, these students then worked for a further two days to co-create new course material and resources, still with the same key learning messages. These materials were then given to commercial designers along with design instructions from the students. The resultant materials were then commercially reproduced to form a box of games, resources, worksheets, posters and a set of facilitator notes in order to test them out. The newly formed course and resources were then trialled with another group of Key Stage 3 students in different schools in different boroughs in order to enable further refinement of the resources and programme, where necessary.

Each module has been developed around a challenge framework so that students themselves work at their potential and set their own work level and commitment. The framework sets out the challenge to be achieved at the end of the course early on the first day of the course. There was also a series of short-term mini-challenges, set throughout the course, which helped participants to build towards the final challenge.

### Key Stage 3

The rationale for choosing students in Key Stage 3 was in order to build capacity in schools so that, after attending the course, students would have a minimum of two years' activity in this capacity in school before they could leave at 16.

NCSL has also supported a training programme for facilitators, with both adults and students as peer facilitators. The long-term aim is to develop a student body who experience the Student Leadership Programme themselves first, and then learn how to facilitate the next student group, so creating a continuous and self-sustaining model of student leaders who are helping to develop the next generation of student leaders.

### The boroughs and schools that took part

#### Foundation module 1: Understanding self and others

co-development: Haringey  
pilot: Hackney

#### Module 2: Shaping the future

co-development: Southwark  
pilot: schools from Essex, Camberwell and Lambeth

#### Module 3: Leading learning and teaching

co-development: Lambeth  
pilot: schools from Kent and Dulwich

#### Module 4: Building a community and collaboration

co-development: schools from Billericay, Islington and Brockley  
pilot: schools from Camden

#### Module 5: Managing an organisation, programme or project

co-development: schools from Greenwich and Camden  
pilot: Bromley

#### Module 6: Securing accountability, impact of your actions and taking responsibility

co-development: Greenwich  
pilot: Bromley

### The young people who came

The participating schools recruited young people from a range of ages and abilities. Some brought a very homogenous group, ie, same sex, same age, same ability level: others took the opportunity to bring young people from all three age groups in Key Stage 3. Some brought young people who are often troubled and challenged by school: they were often visited by their behaviour and learning support mentors. Some participants were challenged by literacy and some were fairly recent arrivals to the country, engaging with new concepts at the same time as gaining skills in the English language. We worked with a cohort of young people from a special school and other young people who had statements of special educational needs as well as young people who were on the gifted and talented register. A range of faiths, cultures and ethnicities was represented.

Each school brought two members of staff to experience the course with the students. These were often a teacher and a member of the support staff.

There were end-of-course evaluations that showed some of the judgements and learning on the course, together with some of the aspirations that these enthusiastic and creative young people had for activities when they returned to their schools.

There was no formal long-term evaluation of impact associated with the course, but schools inform us of how they are continuing and developing the work.

### Some examples of activity since the course

- Students have attended and run workshops and given an opening keynote speech at NCSL's national conference, and have spoken at regional conferences.
- One student has co-hosted an NCSL hotseat discussion.
- One student has written a diary of her training experience and has had it published in Ldr, NCSL's magazine.
- Twenty-two students have undertaken a two-day training course to become peer facilitators for the programme.
- Eight students have helped so far to deliver course sessions.
- Peer facilitators from a school in Haringey have run transition workshops for children from five feeder primaries.
- Young people are cascading the learning from the course during lunchtime clubs to Year 7 pupils.
- Many of the students have been involved in cascading their learning through key stage and year group assemblies.

*"I am now exploding with thoughts and ideas"*



## What we have learnt from running the programme

We have learnt a number of valuable lessons and had some of our knowledge confirmed.

Three key areas emerge from the evidence:

- 1) pedagogy:** the processes of imparting knowledge and skills
- 2) learning design:** what we learnt from the way the pedagogy was embodied into the structure and design of the learning
- 3) values and relationships:** the values that brought the pedagogy and design into a meaningful whole

### 1) Pedagogy

The messages for school leaders are as follows:

- Students need time to question, link and reflect: the programme is not a bolt-on to an overcrowded curriculum, but needs time and space to develop.
- Students can engage with complex ideas using a range of delivery styles: young people enjoy being interactive and active.
- There is a need to practice with a real or imaginary scenario.
- Students benefit from role play and simulation activities when transferring learning.
- The power of revealing the process, undertaken through feedback, circle discussion, conversation and drawing out students' understandings is an even more powerful process when led by students themselves.
- Participants need to be able to sit through silence: the 11-second principle.
- Adults need to model leadership behaviours explicitly throughout and constantly refer to them: a meta-language.

- We discovered the importance of a good metaphor for young people: leaders can push from behind and thus model leadership behaviour, as well as pull from the front, enabling students to be comfortable with the concepts of leadership and helping them become more involved.

### 2) Learning design

The messages for school leaders are as follows:

- Young people are interested in how they learn – and are interested to know that we are interested.
- Students specifically fed back the following.
  - Don't stand in front of us and talk for any more than five minutes – we will switch off after that.
  - Give us enough information to start a task, but let us find the learning for ourselves – it's more interesting that way.
  - Let us learn by doing it rather than talking about it.
  - I don't like being out of my comfort zone but I know I'll learn new things if I am.
  - Do lots of physical things to help us to learn.
  - Tell us why you do what you do.
  - Let us show off our talents.
- It is worth investing time in building trust and team skills in the design of initial sessions.
- It is worth taking a risk to work across schools or age groups, for example with vertical groupings, as it can be a powerful way of developing leadership skills.

- A considered and appropriate learning environment, physical and emotional and including food, is important to the success of the first and, to a lesser extent, subsequent days.
- The development of individual conversations and relationships is important.
- The learning circle debrief is powerful as a means of making the learning process as explicit as the learning activity.
- The design of the programme needs to reflect that students need to have time to question, link and reflect on the programme, which is not seen as a bolt-on to an overcrowded curriculum, but needs time and space to develop to be an effective tool for school improvement.
- The students need real opportunities and activities to work on to practise their skills back at school in a climate where they are supported to experiment and take risks.
- Young people respond and react positively when being led by other young people.
- A declared clean-slate policy is helpful to most and particularly to those who often find school a challenging place to be.
- The programme should be treated as a right, not a privilege, and the responsibilities that come through participation are encouraged through coaching and asking young people to reflect on the effects of their behaviours upon others.
- Openness and explicitness about leadership behaviours helps to reveal a hidden curriculum which is expected but often implicit in schools. We expect and also model leadership qualities and skills, and then individually coach young people to be able to show them.

The students have learnt the following:

### 3) Values and relationships

The messages for school leaders are as follows:

- The high status accorded to the programme was affirming for the young people, and the school needs to model the value of the programme in the way it supports it.
- The value of this affirmation in building self-efficacy in students should not be underestimated, but should be taken seriously, as it contributes to the whole leadership issue.
- What you model as an adult will be reflected in the students.
- Emotional intelligence and conversation are important as these comprise an adult skill set, and there is a positive response to respect, honesty and openness from the facilitating teams.
- The content of the course and could translate concepts such as accountability into practice.
- Leadership is much more than being about someone called a leader and can be exercised by people who have a range of talents and strengths.
- It is possible to learn methods of working with people they do not know.
- Mistakes can be learnt from and that this can be a good way of learning in some circumstances.
- Actions and manners are as important as what is said.
- Leadership can take them out of their comfort zone and this can be dealt with effectively.
- Working with others can be like designing and requires practice, testing and reflection.

## How can school leaders be supported by this learning to achieve their objectives?

- It is hard to teach.
- It is important to create their own understandings, taking responsibility for their role in a team and having pride in their work.
- They have a range of skills and strengths which they can use to support their school in a variety of ways.
- Skills can be offered in a way that shows respect to the environment in which they learn.
- Roles and activities can be used by students to contribute as leaders into their schools and communities.
- They need to have belief in themselves and confidence that their schools and communities can offer them opportunities to develop those skills further.
- Create a framework that has the support of the whole organisation in order to develop leadership skills and opportunities for young people.
- Create a wide range of opportunities and choice for the range of abilities ages, interests and strengths of the students.
- Create opportunities for developing responsibility and teamwork in an environment that supports young people in acquiring skills and tools and allows the students to practise safely.
- Create opportunities that develop these leadership skills in meaningful and real situations.
- Create opportunities that allow progression for the young people involved as they mature in skill and age.
- Talk to young people about where they can and already do exercise leadership. Often young people can and are doing leadership outside school more often than in the school.
- Consider the body of research on voice and participation and some of the models developed for enabling progression in participation.
- Consider the power that student leaders should be able to exercise, on behalf of the school, in order to make their experiences meaningful rather than tokenistic and manipulative (Hart, 1995).
- Create opportunities that allow for students to make mistakes and reflect on them, providing challenges and modelling the dispositions that can meet the challenge.
- Trust young people to be able to develop projects by stepping back from over-controlling the students.
- Trust that opportunities for leadership in school can be challenging and stretching, but also very enjoyable at the same time.

*"I liked being with my friends but then I realised it was just as fun working with people from other schools. The course also got a strong message across"*




## Key Issues

To summarise, there are key issues that we identified that must be considered if the vision of student leadership represented at the conference is to be realised.

- 1** Barriers in the relationships between students and teachers are perpetuated by preconceptions about their roles in the school. The breaking down of barriers may lead to the renegotiation of roles within the school, which will certainly require the commitment of all participants.
- 2** The creation of a shared language of leadership is needed in the school community. As discussed earlier within the report, the creation of this shared language is facilitated through shared workshop and training sessions.
- 3** The issue of trust in student leadership needs to be addressed, so that teachers have the confidence that students will act responsibly in their leadership roles and students have the confidence that their voices will be heard and that they will make a difference. This issue could be addressed through the preparation and training of teachers and students together in leadership and research skills.

- 4** The creation of powerful learning communities is necessary so that student leadership can be learnt, developed and applied in and beyond the school community.
- 5** The creation of networks of learning communities will facilitate the training and mentoring of students and teachers in the development of student leadership, and encourage the sharing of experiences and ideas.

Our evaluation of this work is that it seemed to inspire students, teachers and educational leaders to carry the torch for student voice and student leadership as entitlements for all our young people. However, it is unlikely that many will be able to change the culture of their schools and facilitate the development of student leadership without external training, support, facilitation and active advocacy as outlined above. The development of student leadership in ways that are sustainable in individual schools and across networks and communities is the next giant step if this vision is to be realised.



*"I will try to use techniques that I have learnt from this course in everyday life. I think this course was an excellent way to spend my holiday"*



## Summary

This was an ambitious concept and programme that has touched the lives of over 400 young people who have experienced one or more modules to date. Overwhelmingly, both students' and teachers' evaluations are very, very positive.

Whilst the specific subject matter of the module was interesting to some, it has been the process experience that has had a motivating and confidence-building effect, and which participants describe, some two years on, as lasting and life-changing.

The programme of six modules will continue to be available to schools in London, supported in part by London Challenge. Grant funding has however ended and the course will now be reconfigured to form one three-day course, covering aspects of all the modules. This will be rolled out nationally with an associated programme that trains adults and young people to deliver it in schools, organisations and across local authorities and that will be available to buy.

*"You can see that once the sessions have been run over a few courses they will be outstanding"*



### Staff comments

“[There was evidence of] improved confidence and clear development for most of the pupils who took part in the course.”

“[It was] an excellent opportunity for all pupils to engage positively for an extended period of time on a shared goal.”

“As an adult being involved, it was a pleasure.”

“There [should] also be some self-reflection sheets which could be reduced and scanned into the booklet.”

### Appendix: References

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*“The course was great and really helped me with my school council business. I am much happier now and loads more confident”*



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